CAP CITY kids

Gift Card Giving:

Programming to Support Unaccompanied Youth During the Holiday Season

WWW.CAPCITYKIDS.ORG

WWW.CAPCITYKIDS.ORG

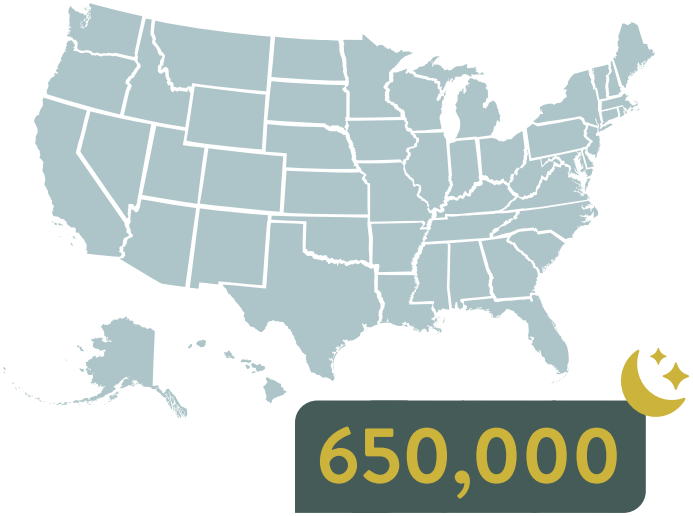
Executive Summary

There are more than 650,000 people experiencing homelessness on any given night in the United States, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's 2023 Annual Homeless Assessment Report. In 2023, homelessness increased nationwide across all household types. That means that each school year, thousands of families are listed as living in temporary living conditions. Many of these families have multiple children, which makes it difficult to get the necessary things they need, especially around the holidays.

For those families, certain resources exist to help lighten the load, but for some students that is not a possibility. Additionally, there are thousands of youth each year who enroll themselves independently in school and are not under the legal care of an adult; they are called **unaccompanied youth.**

CapCityKids (CCK), formally known as the Capital City Fund for Education, is a non-profit 501(c)(3) that provides children facing homelessness with tools they need to receive a quality education. CCK's Unaccompanied Youth Program aims to identify students that migrate from home to home between the ages of 12 and 18 and provide them with gift cards so that they may purchase themselves a gift or necessities around the holidays.

The purpose of this paper is to provide an outline of the CCK's Unaccompanied Youth Program so that it can be replicated in cities across the United States, helping every unaccompanied child feel supported through the holiday seasons.



PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS ON ANY GIVEN NIGHT IN THE UNITED STATES

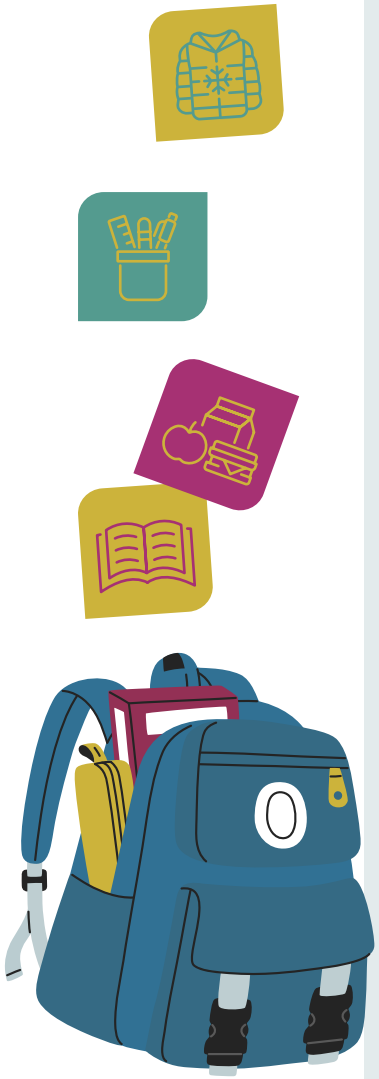
Understanding The Role of Homeless Education Liaisons

Under the McKinney-Vento Act, every local educational agency must appoint a local homeless education liaison, who serves as the district's lead homeless education contact. For the Unaccompanied Youth Program, homeless education liaisons have been the nucleus of the program, enabling CCK to support thousands of youth annually through the holiday season.

Homeless education liaisons ensure that children and youth experiencing homelessness are identified by schools through outreach and coordination and are enrolled in and have an equal opportunity to succeed in school. Homeless education liaisons also ensure that homeless children, youth, and families have access to eligible educational services, healthcare, and transportation services, among other responsibilities. Visit the National Center for Homeless Education's website for more information on the role of homeless education liaisons.

WWW.CAPCITYKIDS.ORG

WWW.CAPCITYKIDS.ORG



Through proactive outreach to homeless education liaisons, CCK has identified unaccompanied youth ages 12-18 who have likely aged out of other holiday gift giving programs. For instance, Toys for Tots provides gifts only for children under 12 in most communities. **In 2023 alone, the CCK Unaccompanied Youth Program provided more than 2,800 Visa and Walmart gift cards to homeless youth ages 12-18 who may not have received a gift otherwise.**

In addition, through collaboration with homeless education liaisons, CCK has also helped to provide individualized support such as social work, mentorship, empowerment academies, a backpack drive with high-quality school supplies, essential hygiene kits, and other necessities such as coats, lunches, books, toys, and car seats.

When replicating a model like CCK's Unaccompanied Youth Program, a corporation should work in partnership with homeless education liaisons. Visit nche.ed.gov/data and click on your preferred state to identify your local homeless school liaison.

Purchasing Gift Cards

While gift cards can be purchased at face value, many corporations offer discounts for bulk purchases. For example, the Visa Foundation has been a key partner for CCK. Securing corporate partnerships when launching an initiative like the Unaccompanied Youth Program can significantly enhance the support you provide to unaccompanied youth.

2,800

VISA & WALMART GIFT CARDS FOR HOMELESS YOUTH AGED 12-18

CAP CITY *kids*

HOW TO CREATE A GIFT CARD GIVING PROGRAM

STEP 1:
Connect with homeless education liaison(s)

STEP 2:
Identify unaccompanied youth ages 12-18

STEP 3:
Partner with corporations to secure gift cards

STEP 4:
Coordinate with homeless education liaison(s) to facilitate distribution

Conclusion

In conclusion, CCK's Unaccompanied Youth Program demonstrates a vital and impactful way to support homeless youth during the holiday season. By collaborating with homeless education liaisons, the program identifies and aids unaccompanied youth, ensuring they receive essential resources and care during a time that can be particularly challenging for many.

The success of this initiative underscores the importance of community partnerships, proactive outreach, and providing resources tailored to the unique needs of homeless youth. As homelessness continues to rise across the United States, replicating this program in other cities can significantly contribute to providing unaccompanied youth with the support they need.

This model offers a replicable, compassionate approach that other organizations and communities can adopt to extend their reach and impact, ensuring that every unaccompanied child feels valued and supported during the holidays.